What Is a Conceptual Model?

The word ***conceptual*** refers to theoretical beliefs. The word ***model*** refers to a simplified representation of reality. A ***Conceptual Model*** is thus a representation of your theoretical beliefs about your project.

A ***Conceptual Model*** is a diagram of a set of relationships between certain factors that are believed to impact or lead to a target condition. A good Conceptual Model:

- Presents a picture of the situation at the project site.
- Shows assumed linkages between factors affecting the target condition.
- Shows major direct and indirect threats affecting the target condition.
- Presents only relevant factors.
- Is based on sound data and information.
- Results from a team effort.

Before getting to the steps involved in developing your conceptual model, it's worth discussing what these characteristics mean in a general sense.

Presents a Picture of the Situation at the Project Site

An ***outcome*** or ***dependent variable*** is a function of other variables. For example, a child's health status (the dependent variable) is dependent on his or her diet and the presence of diarrhea and other diseases, among other factors.

influence through your project activities. In your

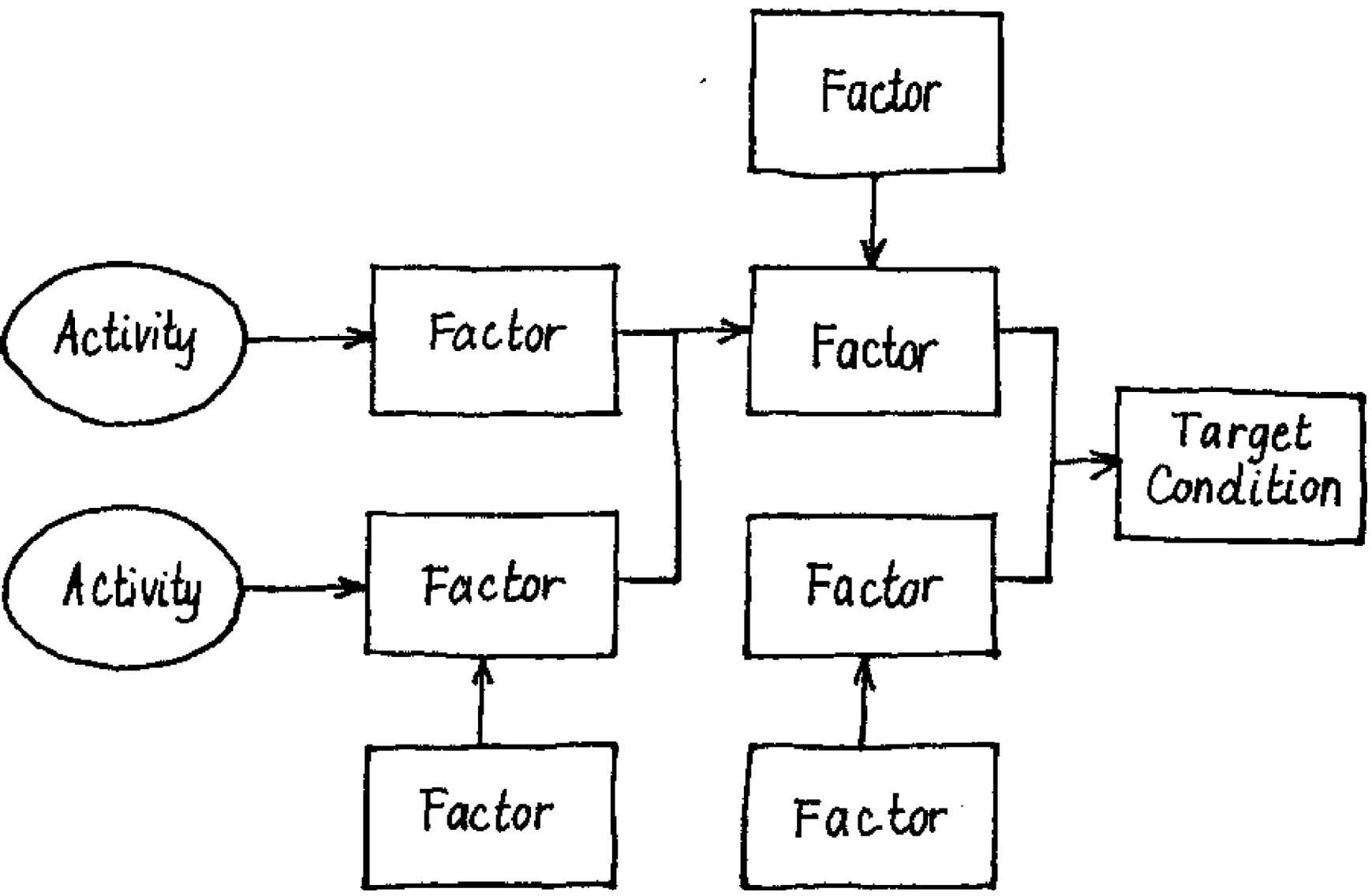
A ***predictor*** or ***independent variable*** is a variable that is used, possibly in conjunction with other variables, to describe a given outcome or dependent variable. In the example, the child's diet and the presence of diarrhea and other diseases are the independent variables.

Factors are the specific events, situations, conditions, policies, attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors that you believe affect the target condition. Some of the most important factors that you must consider in model building for conservation and development projects are direct and indirect threats to biodiversity. Factors correspond roughly to ***predictors*** or ***independent variables*** in evaluation research. They are what determine the outcome or status of the dependent variable.

Activities are the actions you plan to take to modify particular factors which in turn will influence the status of the target condition. In evaluation research, a project activity can be equated to an event, treatment, or exposure that will cause a change in specific factors and the target condition. Project activities will be covered in chapter 4.

Relationships in the Conceptual Model are represented by arrows. These arrows usually point in one direction. One factor leads to another or one activity influences one or more factors. You find arrows between individual factors, leading from one factor to multiple other factors, leading from your activities to factors, and from factors to the target condition. As we will see later on in this section, getting the target condition, factors, and activities arranged with the arrows connecting them so that the model makes sense is as much an art as it is a science.

What does a Conceptual Model look like? As illustrated below, in a general sense, a Conceptual Model contains a target condition on one side of the drawing and a number of factors and activities linked to this target condition.



The process of constructing your Conceptual Model can be divided into two general phases. The first phase involves creating an *Initial Conceptual Model* that shows what is going on at your project site before you begin the project. This model describes the site's target condition, factors, and relationships prior to the start of your project. The second phase, which we discuss in chapter 4, involves treating your Initial Conceptual Model as a base and adding on the project activities that you will carry out to reach

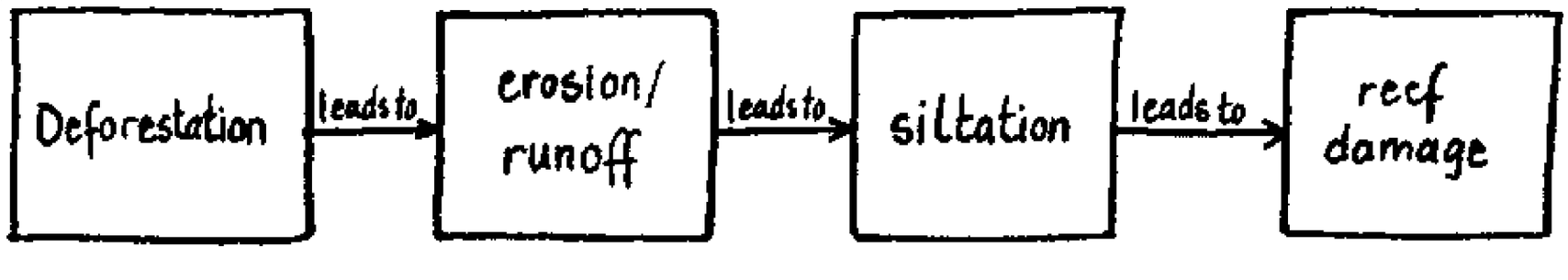
your project goals and objectives. Once you complete this second phase, you will then have a complete *Project Conceptual Model* that shows how you expect your project will influence the situation at your site.

Shows Assumed Linkages Between Factors Affecting the Target Condition

Process Hint: See chapter 6 for a more in-depth discussion of some of the major project assumptions in conservation and development projects.

A Conceptual Model is the basis of good project planning and allows you to explicitly see how different factors are linked together and thus how best to plan and manage your project. It also shows likely obstacles or difficulties you may encounter along the way and it illustrates (as we will see later) how your planned interventions may affect the target condition. A good model also makes project assumptions and underlying assumptions obvious and evident to everyone involved in the project. Finally, a good Conceptual Model permits you to identify the appropriate and necessary data you need for efficient and effective project monitoring.

Developing a Conceptual Model is similar to generating a hypothesis in basic scientific research. As you connect some factors to others, project activities to factors and factors to the target condition, you are assuming (or hypothesizing) that these relationships are true. The model provides you the opportunity to formally state relationships you believe affect your target condition and that you will later test with your monitoring efforts. For example, in the Coastal Scenario, the project team might develop a project assumption:



This project assumption shows that we assume that deforestation of the hills in the project area causes erosion of soil which runs off into rivers and causes the water to become full of dirt which gets washed into the ocean, smothering and killing the reef. So, a Conceptual Model allows you to show well-established relationships between factors and the target condition and to exhibit relationships that you believe exist. The model also provides the framework for you to be able to test the validity and accuracy of your assumptions as shown in the box that follows.

Shows Major Direct and Indirect Threats Affecting the Target Condition

In recent years, conservation and development practitioners have found it increasingly difficult to demonstrate the impact of the projects they manage. Why is this? One possible reason is that conservation projects have become much more complex in their design and implementation. Only a few decades ago, the most often used approach to conservation was park establishment and management. In theory (although not necessarily in practice) this approach seems easy and basic—declare a park, put up a fence, and keep people out. Measuring conservation success was fairly straightforward—having no one inside the park engaged in illegal activities equaled conservation success. The negative social consequences on the people living around the park were not taken into consideration by outside project managers.

Now, however, most conservation projects strive to incorporate local people into the management and conservation of

natural resources. Conservationists have found that it is not only difficult and expensive to maintain parks but also impractical and even unethical to forbid local residents from having at least some access to the resources within the park boundaries. What the conservation field has gained in equity, it has lost in simplicity. Social, economic, and political forces become the major factors that must be addressed in order to ensure the long-term security of natural areas. Finding a balance between conservation and utilization of natural resources has become the primary challenge—conservation and development projects must be designed with the accomplishment of this balance as their ultimate aim.

Most conservation and development projects are designed to decrease the pressure people place on natural resources—to reduce the ***direct threats*** and ***indirect threats*** to biodiversity. It thus stands to reason that success of a conservation and development project can be measured by the extent to which these pressures are reduced.

The Threat Reduction Assessment (TRA) approach to project design, management, and monitoring operates under three assumptions:

- Almost all biodiversity destruction is human induced.
- All human threats to biodiversity can be identified at a site-specific level.
- Actual reduction of threat to biodiversity can be measured.

Using the TRA allows you to simplify your work by focusing on the key threat factors while planning and monitoring your project. If you can be confident that you have identified all the threats to biodiversity at a site and that you have addressed all of these threats, then you can assume that conservation has occurred or will occur in the future.

To implement this approach, a Conceptual Model for a conservation and development project must include direct and indirect threats to biodiversity as factors in the model. You will then be able to measure your success in meeting these threats over time. By accurately identifying the threats, measuring their status before your project begins, designing and implementing appropriate project activities, and monitoring the impact of your activities over time, you can determine the extent to which your project has been successful and make whatever adjustments are necessary.

Presents Only Relevant Factors

A good Conceptual Model does not attempt to explain all possible relationships or contain all possible factors that influence the target condition but instead tries to simplify reality by containing only the information most relevant to the model builder. One of

Direct threats are those factors that immediately impact biodiversity or physically cause its destruction.

Indirect threats are those factors that underlie or lead to the direct threats.

For example, the cutting down of forest by migrants to plant crops might be considered a direct threat to the biodiversity of the region. Poverty and lack of knowledge of the migrants who are cutting the trees are examples of indirect threats.

Common direct threats to biodiversity include habitat loss and fragmentation, overexploitation of living resources, introduction of exotic species, and pollution. Common indirect threats include human population growth, poverty, and social and economic policies that cause insecurity in local economies.

Some factors that may be classified as threats at one site, may not be threats at another. For instance, "hunting" is a factor that is found in two of our scenarios; it is classified as a threat in the Savannah Scenario but not in the Wetlands Scenario.

In fact, a factor like hunting can even be simultaneously a threat to and an opportunity for conservation at a given site in the sense that it may currently occur at unsustainable levels and yet, if managed properly, could serve as a strong incentive to sustainably manage forest habitats.

A common criticism of a threat-based approach to project design and monitoring is that it focuses on negative problems rather than positive opportunities. While we endorse the concept of creating more positive views of conservation (using a technique called "Appreciative Inquiry"), we believe that this is not sufficient to define effective projects. We believe a threat-based focus is a more practical way of overcoming constraints to achieving specific objectives.

the difficulties in building models is to include enough information to explain what influences the target condition without containing so much information that the most critical factors or relationships are hidden. Too much information can conceal important aspects of the model, while too little information in the model leads to oversimplification which in turn leads to a higher likelihood that the portrayal is not accurate. So, a perpetual challenge to building good models is to find a balance between presenting too much and too little information.

Drawing a Conceptual Model is as much an art as it is a science. You first need to get good and reliable information (the science) that you'll arrange in a diagram (the art) to represent your interpretation of the situation at your site. Whatever you do, don't downplay the artistic aspect of developing your Conceptual Model—it's often the hardest part to do. Like a big puzzle, the easy part is getting your hands on the pieces (the different bits of information composed of the target condition, factors, and activities). The difficult part is putting those pieces together in some semblance of order. Even more challenging than a true puzzle that has only one correct final arrangement, a Conceptual Model can have multiple correct arrangements. Furthermore, the model is only a best guess—one that must be changed and revised as you get more information and develop new insights.

Based on Sound Data and Information

Ultimately, a Conceptual Model is only as good as the ***data*** and ***information*** upon which it is based. Conceptual models are composed of ***existing information*** and ***primary information***. As we will see in the next section of this chapter, the first step in developing your model is to review all available existing information. Existing information is useful because it has already been compiled and in many instances can be easily accessed. You may find, however, that in some cases existing information is difficult to obtain because, for example, original documents no longer exist or people are unwilling to share materials with you. Existing information is usually most helpful as background material.

Once you have developed a first draft of your Conceptual Model, you will then need to go to the field to collect primary information to further develop your model. Collecting primary data allows you to design the format, approach, and tools to obtain information directly from residents of the project site, relevant experts, or your own observations. With primary data you have more control over the type and quality of the information you collect. If you are not a resident of the area where the project is taking place, then gathering primary data requires visiting local communities and spending time with residents to understand firsthand the situation in the field. For conservation projects, it also demands

Strictly speaking, ***data*** are collected through monitoring and research efforts while ***information*** is drawn from these data through analysis. For simplicity, however, we use the phrase "collecting information" as a shorthand way of saying "collecting data and analyzing it to extract information."

Existing information is data that have already been collected for some purpose other than designing and monitoring your project.

Primary information is data that you specifically collect while designing and monitoring your project.

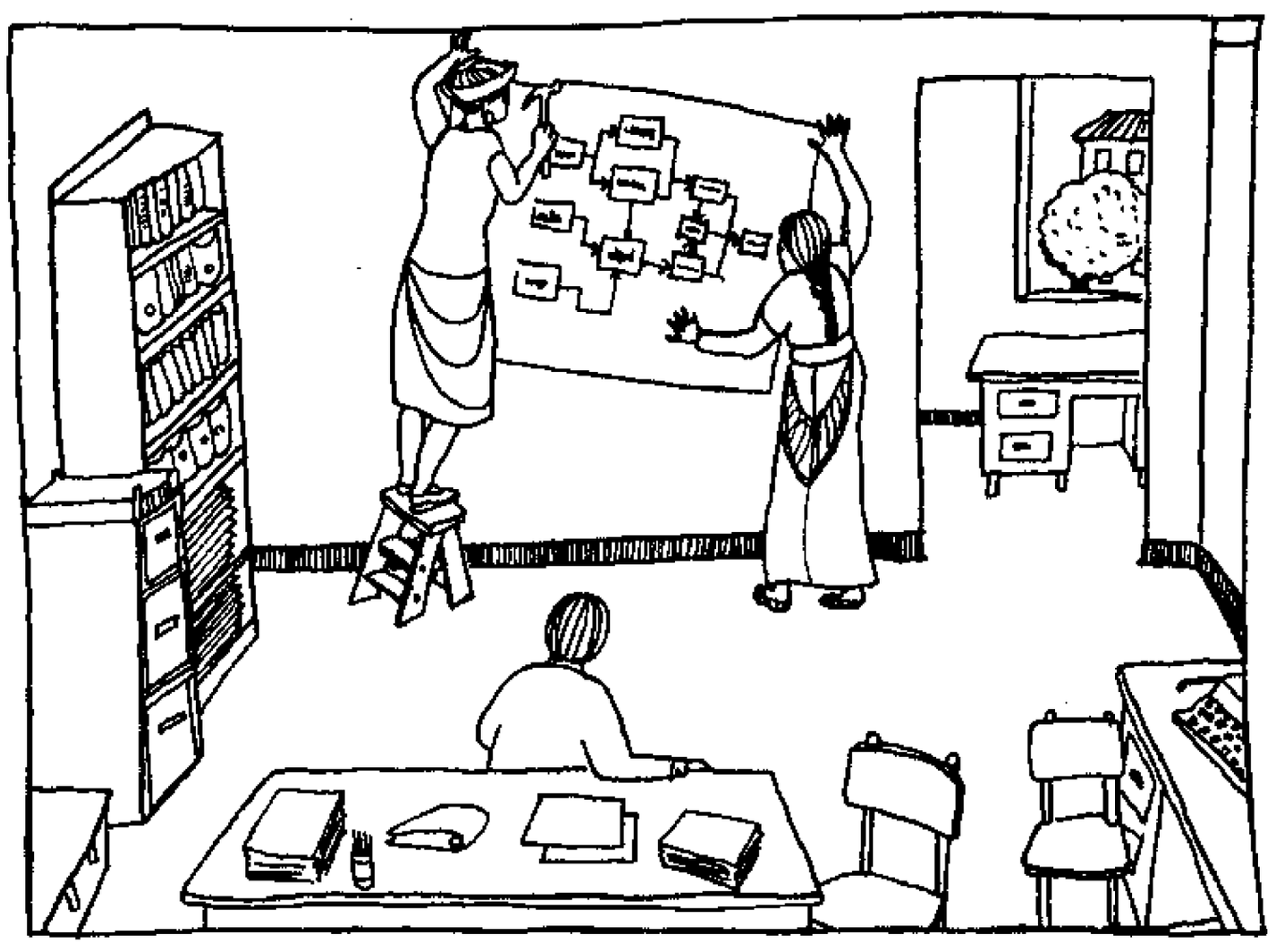
visiting the natural areas that are to be conserved to observe their biological composition, dynamics, and importance and to see how they are related to the people that live in or around them.

Results from a Team Effort

Developing a Conceptual Model can be a helpful activity for a project team. While you build your model, team members can share ideas about important factors at your site and how they think these factors influence the target condition. This kind of discussion can help your team come to some mutual agreement or consensus about what factors are important or which threats need to be addressed immediately. By explicitly showing the perceived relationships in diagram form between activities, factors, and the target condition, your team reaches a better understanding of the situation at the site. As a result, it will be easier for them to understand how best to devise project activities that will directly help them reach project goals and objectives.

Process Hint: Going into a Conceptual Model building exercise, team members may tend to think that they hold similar views regarding the major factors affecting the target condition. In many cases, however, they soon find that they have widely differing views. The model building exercise thus becomes an opportunity to discuss these differences and reach a common and clear understanding.

A Conceptual Model is not only helpful when you are starting a new project but can also serve as an important tool that you can use to orient new staff. Many projects have difficulties with a lack of continuity as project staff composition changes over time. New staff members often fail to see the connections between project activities and the intended impact. Furthermore, personnel who design a project are often not the same as those responsible for carrying it out. A final Conceptual Model can help new staff understand why your team has chosen specific project activities. Of course, with the addition of new staff comes new ideas, perspectives, and strategies. The Conceptual Model thus provides an excellent means for your team, new and old, to be able to reevaluate and revise your perceptions of what is going on at the project site. To help keep your team focused on the task at hand, put your model up where everyone can see it.



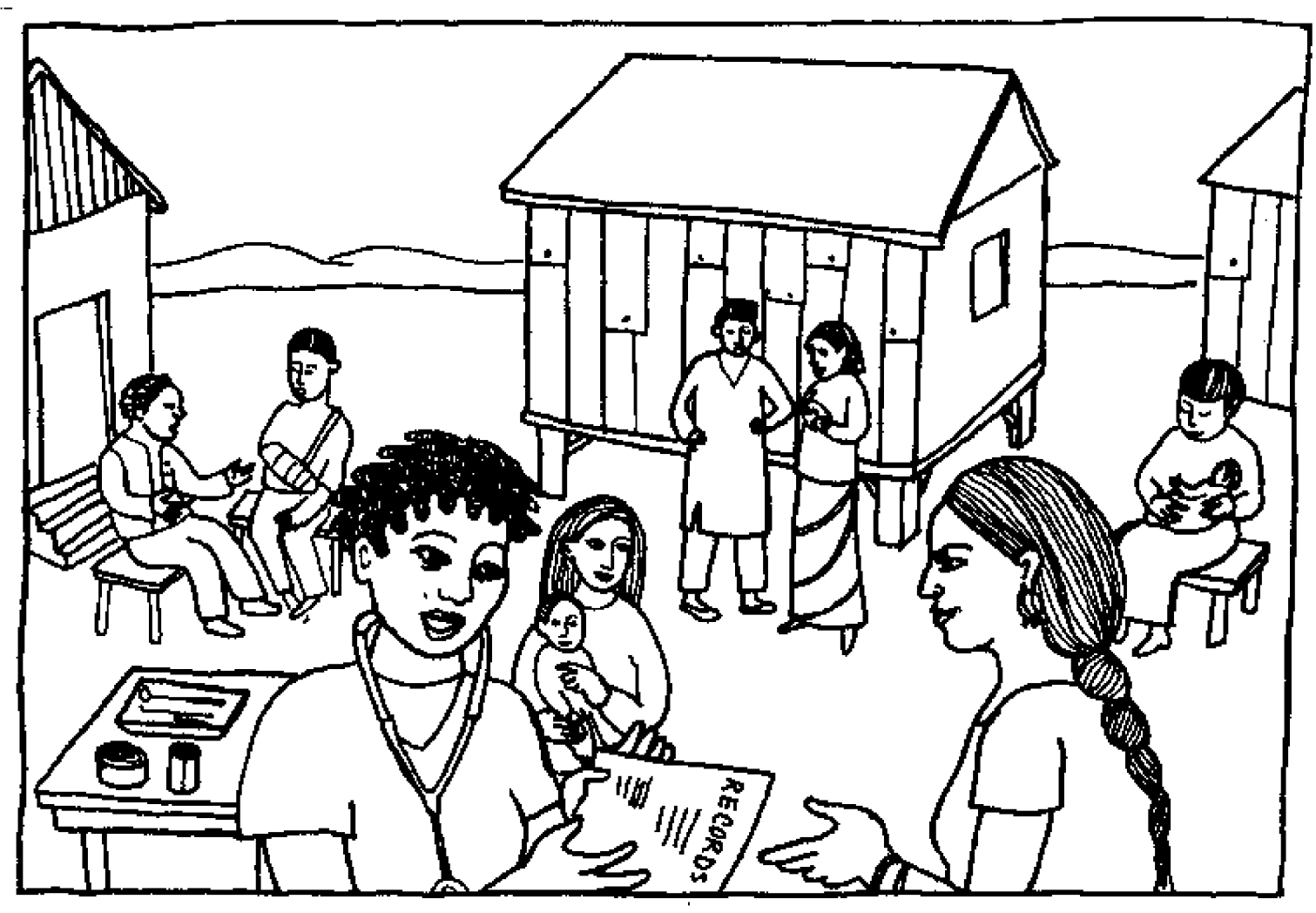
How Do You Develop a Conceptual Model?

A complete Project Conceptual Model is developed in five basic steps. We'll go through the first four steps in this chapter and cover the fifth one in chapter 4. We delay describing this last step because the complete Project Conceptual Model includes your project activities, which we will introduce in chapter 4.

Review and Compile Existing Information About Your Project Site (Step A1)

Building a Conceptual Model requires the same basic background review as any kind of scientific or evaluation research. Unfortunately, one of the most common mistakes made by researchers and program planners alike is a failure to review existing information—in doing so, they overlook a great, readily available resource. The more you know about previous work related to your field site or project, the better your Conceptual Model and project will be. By reviewing existing information, you will increase the odds that your project is well rooted in reality and does not duplicate previous work or other projects' mistakes.

Most of the time, you will find that there is a wealth of available information waiting to be uncovered that will help you (1) begin to identify the important factors at the project site, (2) develop project assumptions, and (3) determine what project activities might work best—in other words, help you to construct your Conceptual Model.



Collect Existing Information

Whether your project team is composed of local residents or outsiders, the first task involves collecting all available existing information about the project site. The trick here is not to be shy about getting any information you can get your hands on. You can get existing information from a variety of sources.

Process Hint: If you are having trouble finding any existing information about your project, don't let this stop you from starting to develop your model. Do the best you can with the information you have and then make sure to collect sufficient primary information while working with the local stakeholders.

Some of the best information may already be close by in the heads of the people with whom you work or live. Sit down with your team members and discuss their knowledge, perceptions, and insights about the project site and potential project activities. You may also find that there are some individuals who are particularly familiar with the area where you intend to work or the local populations living there. Talk to these people and see what they know.

Other sources of existing information are government records and statistics. You can find these records at ministry offices in the capital city or in provincial or district offices. You can often find good records and statistics at health posts, extension offices, and park headquarters. You can also usually get information from nongovernmental organizations working in or near your project site. Sometimes you will find that there are university researchers who have worked in your area and have published potentially helpful reports. Perhaps the organization you work for has conducted previous surveys or studies at the project site. Make sure you draw on these sources to complete your review of existing information.

Process Hint: Many national or local governments maintain libraries that are open to the public. In addition, you will find that most universities, research institutions, and some local NGOs have good publicly accessible libraries where you can also find an abundance of information.

If you are new to your project site, the easiest place to start your search for information may be a local library if one exists. Not only do libraries have books, magazines, and journals but most also keep archives of local and national newspapers, which can be an excellent source of existing information. Another rapidly expanding source of information is the Internet, a global network of computers in which you can (with some know-how and practice) rapidly find information on a variety of topics.

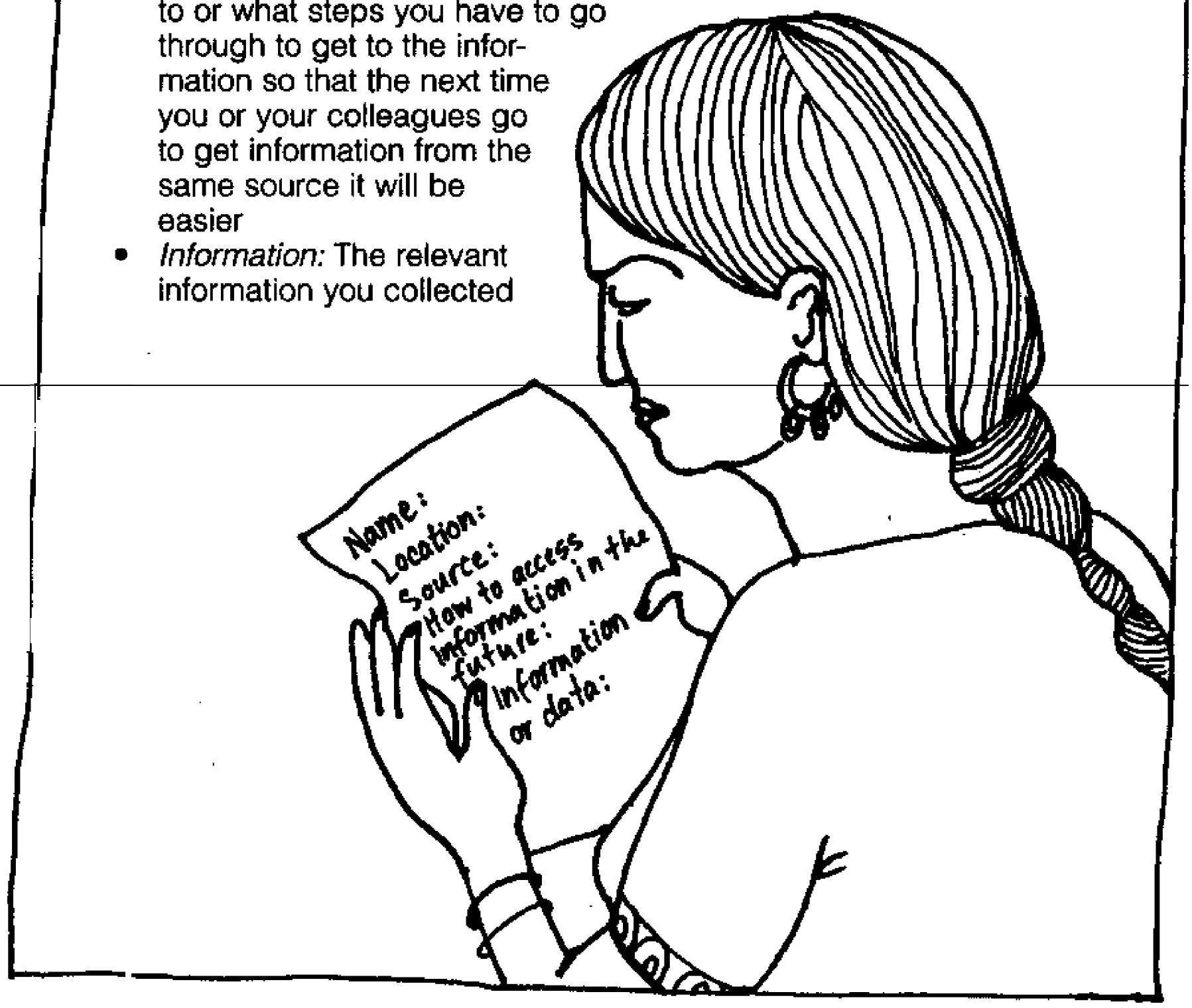
Compile Information in a Standard Format

As you collect information from all these sources, make sure that you do it in a standardized format as illustrated in the example below. Although existing information can often represent a sizable, economical, and diverse source of facts and figures, it does have some drawbacks. Sometimes the difficult part of using existing information is deciding where to start your search for relevant sources. Existing information is rarely in the exact form you need it, and you often have to go through piles of documents to pull out the pieces you want. Also, because someone else collected the information, it is difficult to assess its reliability. Finally, existing information that is relatively old may be out of date and no longer valid.

Example: Collecting Information in a Standardized Format

As you collect existing information, make sure you record it in a standardized way in your notebook, in some other written format, or in your computer. That way, it will be easier to share with your colleagues and refer back to when you begin to develop your model. Also, if you record the source of the information, it may help you to evaluate the quality of the information at a later date. As you collect existing information make sure you include:

- *Your name:* So someone else reading your notes knows who collected the information
- *Date:* Date you collected the information
- *Location:* Where you got the information
- *Source:* From whom you got the information
- *How to gain access to the information in the future:* Who you need to speak to or what steps you have to go through to get to the information so that the next time you or your colleagues go to get information from the same source it will be easier
- *Information:* The relevant information you collected



Develop an Initial Conceptual Model of Your Project Site (Step A2)

Once you have collected all readily available information, you are now ready to begin developing your Conceptual Model.

Identify Target Condition

The first task is to identify your target condition—the situation you intend to influence through your project. Your target condition should be related to the starting point in the project cycle—your group's mission. If you work for a conservation organization, then the target condition for all of your projects should involve biodiversity conservation. If you work for a community development organization, then the target condition for your projects should involve improving human quality of life.

Process Hint: As a rule, the success of your project will be easier to determine if you limit yourself to one simple target condition.

Some organizations may have broader missions relating to both conservation and development. If that's the case, these organizations may be tempted to include two or more target conditions in their Conceptual Model. Alternatively, they may try to define one complex target condition that contains all their goals. Be aware, however, that if you attempt to address multiple target conditions in one project, you may find it difficult to plan project activities that will simultaneously address them all. We would therefore strongly recommend that you try to limit your model outcome to one simple target condition. If you are involved in a conservation project, by excluding community development from your target condition you will not necessarily be ignoring it—it can be brought into the model as one or more factors that influences your target condition.

A ***state*** in this context is used in the sense of an object or system at one point in time.

The target condition is a ***state*** that you want to influence through some activity or intervention. As a result, it must be described as a situation that occurs independent of your project. For example, the target conditions of our scenarios include:

- Tropical forests and fauna in the Indah Biosphere Reserve
- Grassland and savannah ecosystems in Karimara National Park
- Marine biodiversity in Bocoro Bay
- Wetlands in the Everson Watershed

Examples of poorly worded target conditions include:

- To conserve the biodiversity of the Indah Biosphere Reserve
- To maintain the habitat of Karimara National Park
- To protect the marine resources in Bocoro Bay
- To preserve the wetlands in the Everson Watershed

Notice that our examples of poorly worded target conditions include action words like "conserve," "maintain," "protect," and "preserve." As we will see later, however, these action words will be used when it's time to take action and the target condition is transformed into the project goal. The target condition merely describes the existing situation we will be trying to change with our project activities.

Identify and List Factors That Influence the Target Condition

Based on the extensive review of existing information you've just conducted and what you already know about your field site, you should now be able to identify three main categories of factors:

- *Direct Threats.* Factors that immediately affect biodiversity (the target condition) or physically cause its destruction.
- *Indirect Threats.* Factors that underlie or lead to the direct threats.
- *Contributing Factors.* Factors that are not classified as indirect or direct threats but that somehow affect the target condition. ***Opportunities*** are included in this category.

As you and your team go through the existing data you have collected, list the major direct and indirect threats and contributing factors that you believe somehow affect the target condition at your site. For now, don't worry about how they all fit together, just list them.

For the remainder of this chapter, we will use the Savannah Scenario as an example of how you might develop a Conceptual Model and rank threats. After a review of existing information, you might initially conclude that the following factors are the most important ones affecting the target condition which is:

Grassland and savannah ecosystems of Karimara National Park

Direct Threats

- Hunting
- Cattle grazing in Karimara National Park
- Fire
- Diseases from cattle and dogs transmitted to wildlife

Indirect Threats

- Poverty
- Lack of knowledge of national park hunting restrictions

Contributing Factors

- Weather
- Social/cultural values

Opportunities are factors that potentially have a positive effect on your target condition. As we stated before, sometimes threats can also be opportunities.

Process Hint: The key to developing both the target condition and factors is not to think of them in either positive or negative terms but as neutral states that do not show direction. For example, you would not talk about "increased clear-cutting." Instead you would call it "commercial timber harvesting."

Arrange Factors and Target Condition in Diagram Format

A picture of the project team arranging the factors in their Conceptual Model in diagram format can be seen below. The general procedures to complete this task are:

Process Hint: The best way to arrange the factors and target condition in a diagram is to cut out small pieces of paper (self-sticking memo notes work very well for this) and write the factors and target condition on them. Lay them out on a table or on the ground. It is best if you do this over a very big piece of paper so that you can draw the arrows that connect them together.

1. Place the target condition off to one side of your work space.

2. Take the direct threat factors and place them just off to one side of the target condition. As you do this, draw arrows to show how you believe, based on your team's knowledge and the existing information, the various direct threats relate to each other and the target condition.

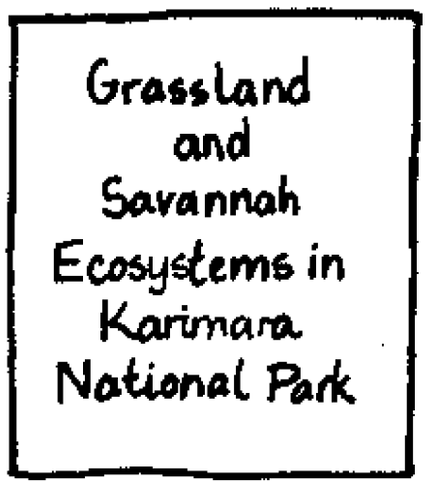
3. Include and arrange the indirect threats in a way that shows how they lead to or influence the direct threats and the target condition. Make sure you continue to include the arrows.

4. Add the contributing factors to show how they influence the other factors (direct and indirect threats) and the target condition.

5. Reexamine your new model to see if it represents your field site to the best of your knowledge given the information you have. Refine it if you think you need to do so.

The following shows an example of the use of this procedure in creating a model diagram.

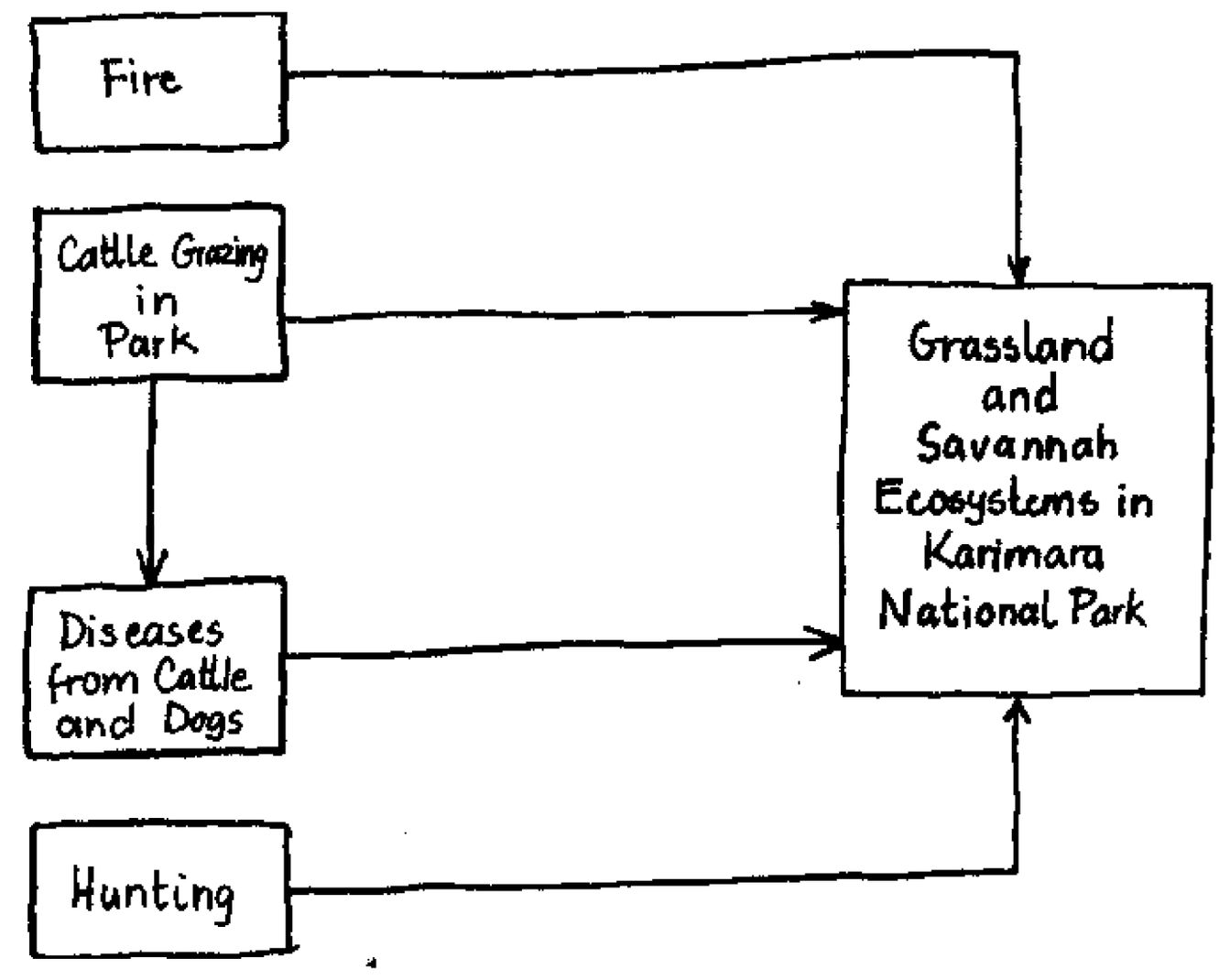
1. Place the target condition off to one side of your work space.



Comments: Target condition is "Grassland and Savannah Ecosystems in Karimara National Park."

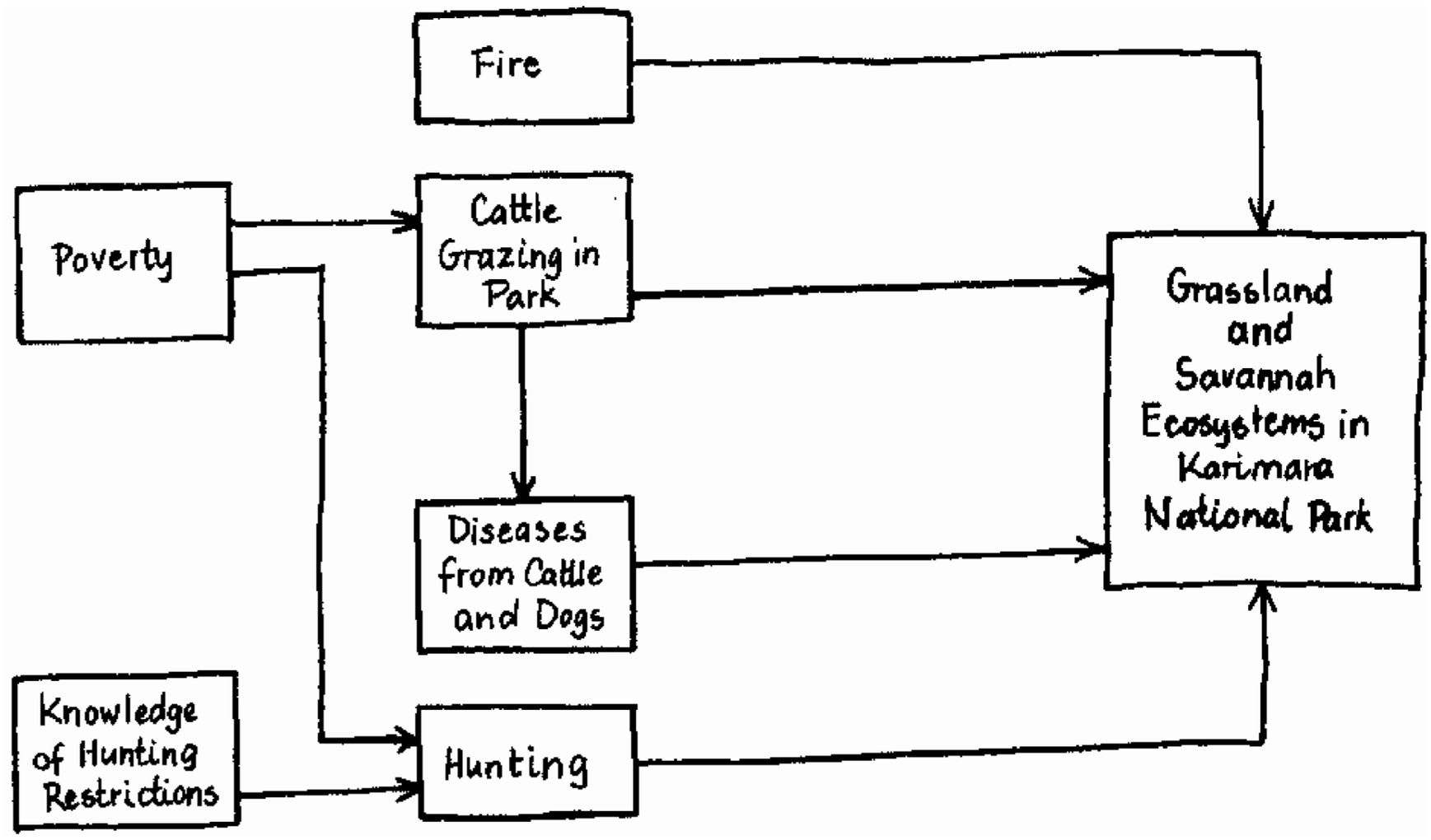
Process Hint: We are using "*Comments*" to explain this process—you don't need to include them.

2. Take the direct threat factors and place them just off to one side of the target condition. As you do this, draw arrows to show how you believe, based on your team's knowledge and the existing information, the various direct threats relate to each other and the target condition.



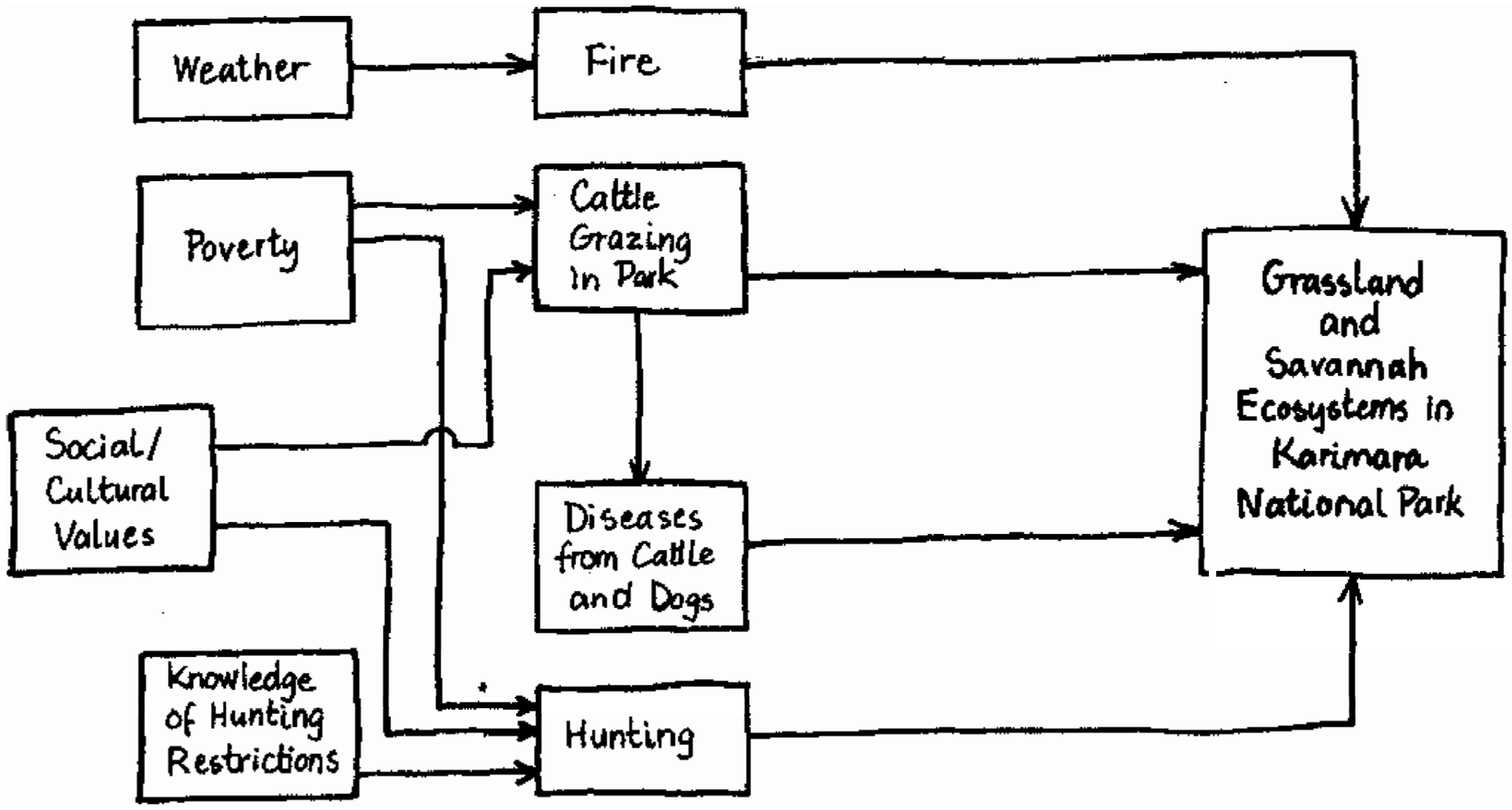
Comments: (1) "Hunting," "Cattle grazing in the park," "Diseases from cattle and dogs," and "Fire" all directly affect the target condition. (2) "Cattle grazing in the park" also affects the transmission of disease to wild animals. (3) "Disease from cattle and dogs" causes hoof-and-mouth disease in wild grazing animals and distemper in wild dogs.

3. Include and arrange the indirect threats in a way that shows how they lead to or influence the direct threats and the target condition. Make sure you continue to include the arrows.



Comments: According to local sources (1) "Poverty" influences both "Cattle grazing in the park" and "Hunting" as local people raise cattle and hunt to cover basic family needs. (2) "Lack of knowledge of hunting restrictions" in the park affects "Hunting."

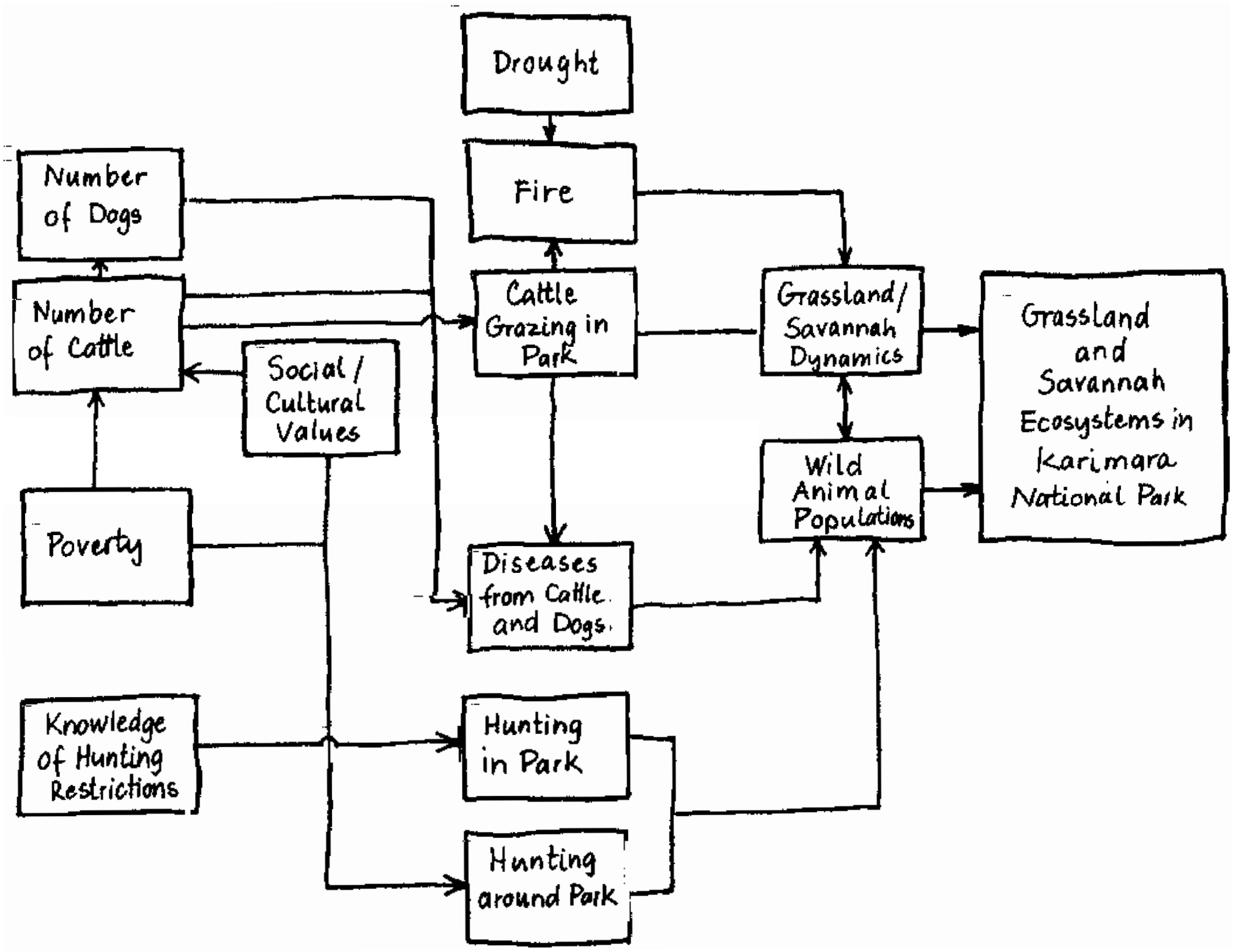
4. Add the contributing factors to show how they influence the other factors (direct and indirect threats) and the target condition.



Process Hint: Try to avoid crossing lines whenever possible. If it is unavoidable, use the bridge symbol ∩ to show where the lines cross.

Comments: (1) "Weather" affects the conditions which lead to "Fire." (2) "Social/cultural values" affect both "Cattle grazing in the park" and "Hunting" practices. In the communities around the park, having a lot of cattle gives the owner greater social status.

5. Reexamine your new model to see if it represents your field site to the best of your knowledge given the information you have. Refine it if you think you need to do so.



Comments: (1) To make the factor more specific, "Weather" was changed to "Drought" as it is a lack of rain that leads to dry conditions and fire. (2) Also to be more specific, we added the factors "Grassland/savannah dynamics" and "Wild animal populations." (3) We also added the factors "Number of cattle" and "Number of dogs," as it is believed the more cattle and dogs there are, the more likely they will infect wild animals with domestic diseases. (4) We added an arrow between "Cattle grazing in the park" and "Fire," as herders set fire to grasslands to encourage new growth of pastures for their cattle. (5) We divided "Hunting," to be more specific, into "Hunting in the park" and "Hunting around the park," as these are very different effects with different legal status. (6) We modified the effects of "Social/cultural values" to show that it indirectly affects "Cattle grazing in the park" through the "Number of cattle." (7) We similarly modified the relationship between "Poverty" and "Cattle grazing in the park," as the economic status of residents determines how many head of cattle they have.

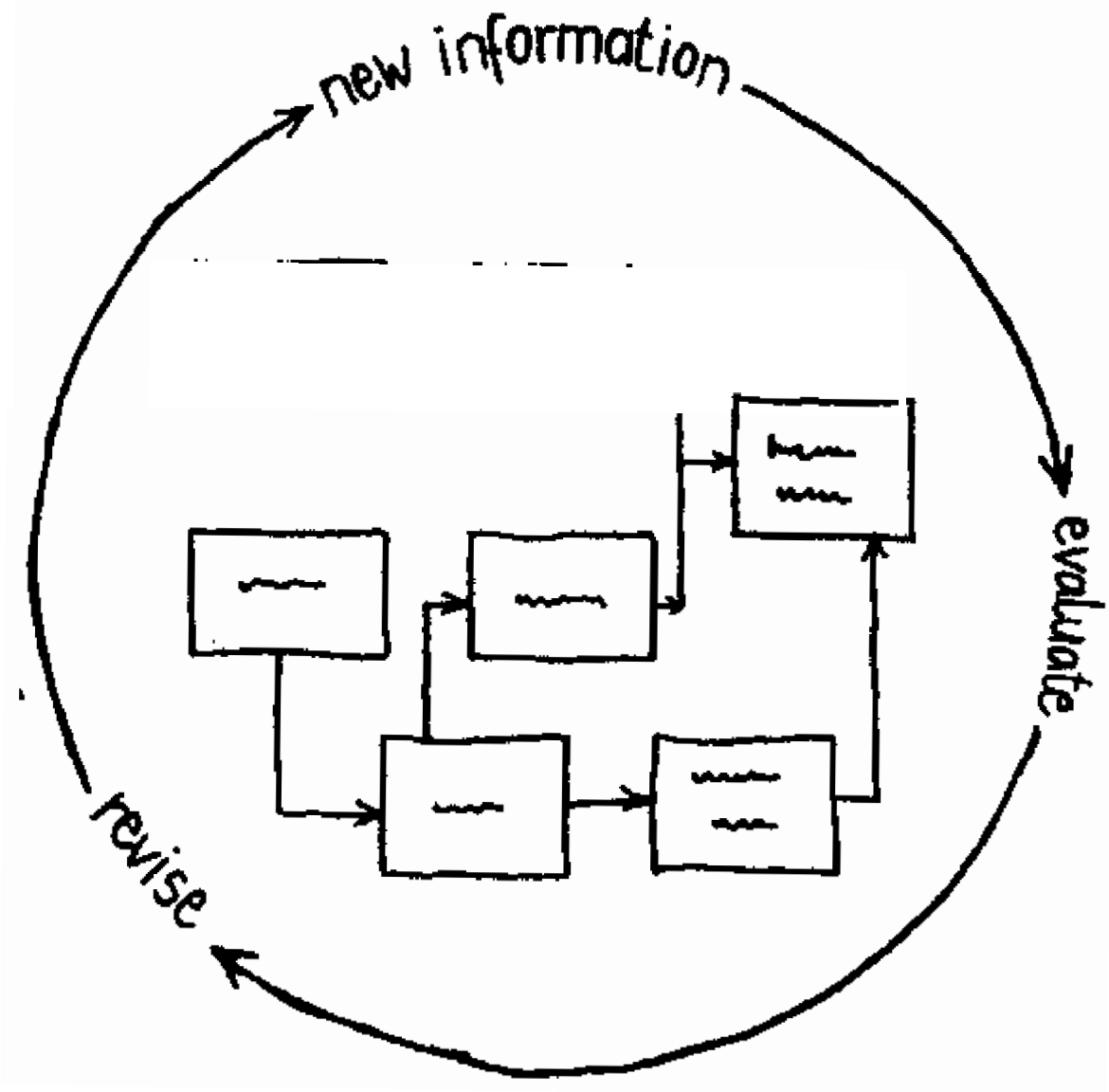
Process Hint: You may at times want to combine the relationship arrows of two (or more) boxes that lead to a common third factor—for example, "Number of cattle" and "Number of dogs" leading to "Diseases from cattle and dogs," as shown in the diagram.

This process of arranging your Conceptual Model might sound easy at first, but as you will see when you try it, it in fact takes a lot of thought and hard work. As you begin to construct your model, have your team discuss how the model comes together and what the relationships between the factors and target conditions are. As you go through the process, you may want to rearrange the

factors, add some new ones, combine them, or remove others. Again, this is where the art of Conceptual Model building applies. You want your model to be relatively simple and well organized, not cluttered or confused. So before moving on to the next step, you should reexamine your model as shown earlier.

Review and Expand Your Conceptual Model

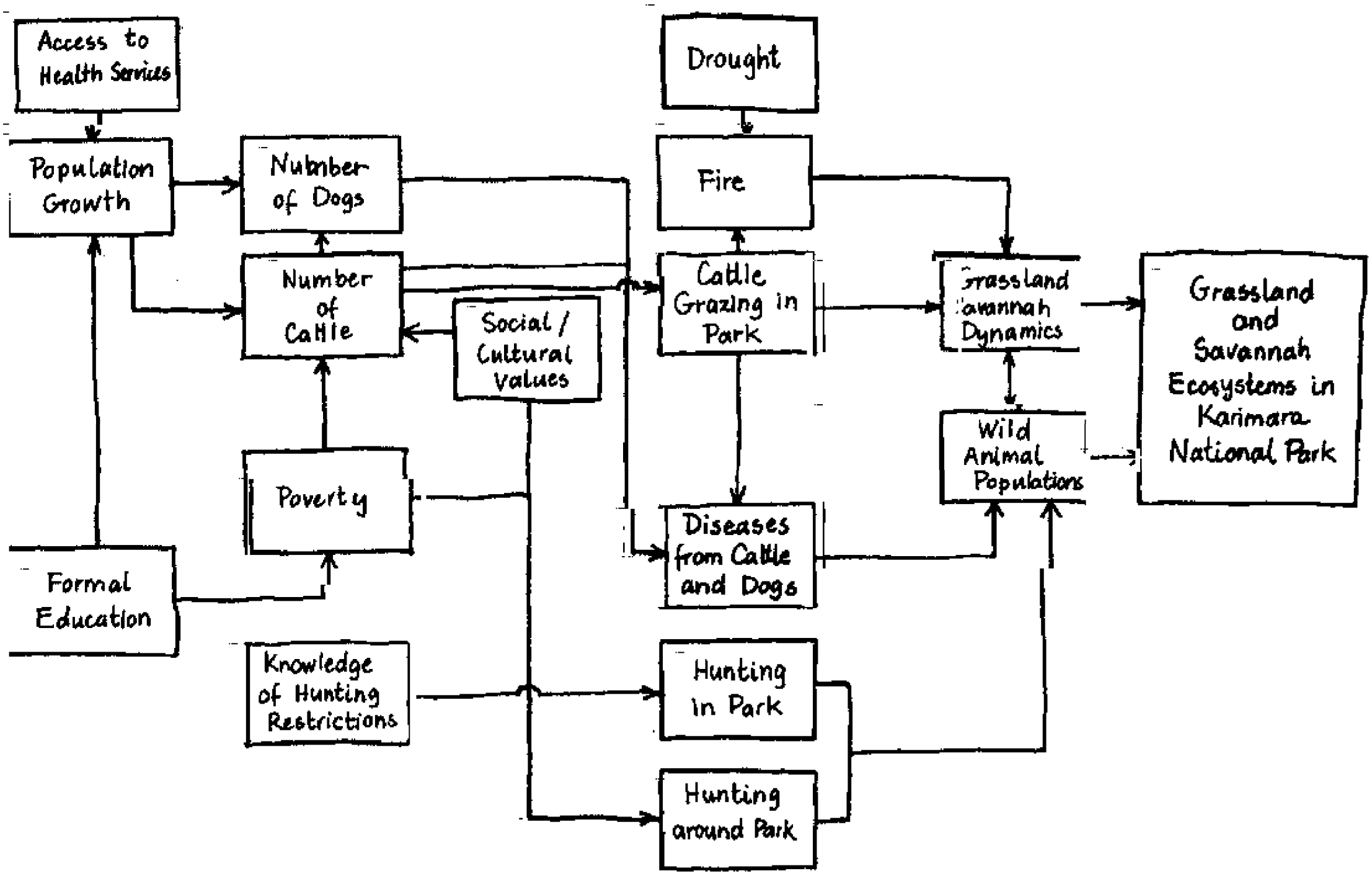
Now you have a basic Conceptual Model that explains how you think certain factors combine to influence the target condition at your field site. Congratulations! But before you get too excited, you should realize that you have only taken the first step to constructing a good model. You still have a lot to do to reach your complete Project Conceptual Model.



The next task is to review your model. Throughout this entire process, whenever you get new information about your site, make sure it fits into your model and determine whether you have to update your model to make use of any conclusions you draw based on the new information. You want to try to keep your model dynamic and flexible—adaptable to any new information you obtain and insights you may gain. The challenge is to keep your model alive.

For instance, returning to the Savannah Scenario, as you review your model with your co-workers, you will probably find that it looks a little like a puzzle with some missing pieces. You may find yourself asking, "What is it that causes a given factor to appear as it does in the model?" If you determine that a broader understanding of this factor is critical to understanding and interpreting the Conceptual Model itself, you need to look into it fur-

ther. You may find the answer in the information you have already collected. On the other hand, you may find that you need to investigate a little more—consult key informants again or review more existing information to get your answers. As you uncover the essential information, expand your Conceptual Model as necessary as shown in the following.



Comments: Based on conversations with key informants, we added the factors "Formal education," "Population growth," and "Access to health services." "Formal education" affects the socioeconomic status of families. "Population growth" affects the number of cattle and dogs—the more people, the more domestic animals. "Access to health services" has a direct bearing on population growth as inadequate health care may lead to premature death and tends to influence women to have more children because they are unaware of the health benefits (for both mothers and children) of adequate child spacing.

Assess Local Site Conditions to Refine and Improve Your Model (Step A3)

You may be wondering why we have not yet formally involved local stakeholders in the Conceptual Model development process—or if your project team is made up of community members, why you haven't yet discussed your ideas with your neighbors. Before talking to local stakeholders, you first must have a fairly good idea of what you want to talk to them about. You don't want to be asking a lot of basic or irrelevant questions that waste their time and make you look like you don't know anything.